



Representative
Tom Petri
Reports
to The Sixth District

6TH DISTRICT OFFICES

WASHINGTON
 2462 Rayburn Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515
 (202) 225-2476

FOND DU LAC
 490 West Rolling Meadows Dr., Suite B
 Fond du Lac, WI 54937
 (920) 922-1180
 Toll-free 1-800-242-4883

OSHKOSH
 115 Washington Avenue
 Oshkosh, WI 54901
 (920) 231-6333



Congress Since September 11th

BY REPRESENTATIVE TOM PETRI

The heightened security around the U.S. Capitol building – the National Guard troops, the barricaded streets, the anthrax alarms, the absence of incoming mail (which only now is starting to trickle in, after having been thoroughly inspected for biological hazards) – serves to remind the Congress every day that we are at war. Of course, the real fight is half a world away. But we are doing our part.

Here are some of the bills Congress has approved since September 11th:

Airport Security — Aviation and Transportation Act of 2001

The current system is broken – and it is up to us to fix it. This plan will get the job done and provide the safest possible environment for American travelers on planes and in airports and trains. I am pleased to have served on the committee which negotiated the compromise between the House and Senate versions of this bill.

The PATRIOT Act

The PATRIOT Act gives law enforcement agencies the tools they need to secure America's future while protecting our freedoms and Constitutional rights. This bill enhances intelligence surveillance tools for the 21st century, strengthens control of our borders, improves law enforcement sharing of information to fight terrorism, enhances penalties for terrorism and broadens the definition of terrorist acts. Many worry that we have done too much to strengthen the police at the expense of civil liberties, but the most worrisome provisions will expire in four years unless Congress takes action to extend them.

2001 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Recovery From and Response To Terrorist Attacks on the United States:

This legislation provides \$40 billion for the War on Terrorism plus disaster and economic assistance in response to the September 11th attacks.

The Air Transportation System Stabilization Act

This bill provides assistance to the airlines which were ordered out of the skies for several days starting September 11th, and which are still in economic trouble partly as a consequence of those attacks.

Authorization for Use of Military Force

Passed promptly after September 11th, this resolution gave the President full authority to use force against the terrorists responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Although not a formal declaration of war, it declares that Congress is uniting with the President to prosecute necessary military action.

Anthrax Attacks

October's terrorist anthrax attacks in Washington resulted in the murder of two postal workers and closed Congress' office buildings for a week, although we managed to continue work on the House and Senate floors and in temporary quarters.

All mail delivery to Congress was halted, and as of late November we were just beginning to receive some deliveries. However, all mail sent to the Congress is now being diverted to facilities in Ohio and New Jersey where it is exposed to high doses of radiation intended to kill all anthrax spores and other biological warfare agents that anybody might try to send to us. Clearly, this slows delivery.

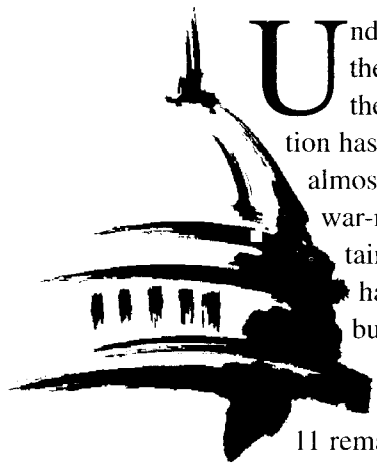
Accordingly, if you have sent mail to my Washington office but have received no reply, please accept my apology and consider calling my Washington office at (202)-225-2476, or my Fond du Lac office at (800)-242-4883. This is especially important if you have a federally-related problem which requires my prompt attention.

If you want to express an opinion in a letter, or if you need to provide documents to help solve a casework problem, you may want to send them to me care of my Fond du Lac office at 490 West Rolling Meadows Drive, Suite B, Fond du Lac, WI 54937. And please consider dropping by to speak with me at one of the Citizen Hour meetings listed in this newsletter.



At left, Rep. Petri discusses security with a National Guardsman. The terrorist threat has resulted in heightened security at the U.S. Capitol. The Capitol building is closed to tourists, roads have been blocked off to frustrate truck bombers, and those with permission to use the congressional parking garages have to pass through stringent checkpoints where car trunks and undercarriages are inspected. As of late November, the Hart Senate Office Building and parts of the Longworth House Office Building remain closed while biological warfare experts try to rid those buildings of anthrax spores. For the first time in decades, National Guard troops are stationed at the Capitol, helping with security.

COMING UP IN CONGRESS



Understandably, over the past few months the Congress' attention has been directed almost exclusively to war-related issues. Certainly, defense issues have to come first, but the problems we needed to address before September 11 remain, and we are likely to return to them during 2002. Here is a brief rundown on some of the major items on our plate:

Patients' Bill of Rights: With my support, the House passed a Patients' Bill of Rights on August 2, closely following approval of a similar bill in the Senate.

Both the House and Senate bills would require health insurance plans to provide easy access to medical specialists, cover emergency care at facilities outside of the plans' networks, and allow patients to see doctors outside of their insurers' networks for additional fees.

The controversy between the two versions of the bill centers on limits on liability. Both versions would allow patients to sue their insurers for harmful decisions, but they differ over who should be liable under various circumstances – the insurer, employer, doctor, plan administrator, etc.

Negotiations over these differences were scheduled for this past fall, but were postponed due to the press of security-related business.

Prescription Drug Benefit: A number of Medicare prescription drug plans have been introduced in both the House and Senate this Congress. Although consideration of these plans has been postponed, the leadership of both parties in Congress have indicated that the issue is a top priority.

The various proposals are similar in design but differ in extent and over whether private insurers would assume any of the financial risk. In general, the proposals would make a prescription drug benefit voluntary and open to all Medicare beneficiaries, and would include monthly premium charges

(with assistance for lower-income enrollees), a small deductible, a 50% co-pay and stop-loss coverage.

Agriculture: The current Farm Bill – the major, catch-all plan which is revisited periodically to adjust agriculture policy for the following five to ten years – expires at the end of 2002. The House approved its latest version of the bill in October.

The House plan expands support programs for commodities, continues federal programs for products such as milk and sugar, and increases conservation programs for farmers.

During consideration of the bill, the Midwest's representatives managed to prevent the continuation of the anti-competitive and anti-consumer Northeast Dairy Compact, but failed in its attempts to bring about fundamental changes in dairy policy designed to bring about a more just arrangement for the Midwest's dairy farmers.

Transportation: It has become clear that Amtrak will not meet the Congress' requirement that it become self-sufficient by the end of 2002, so there will be efforts in the months ahead to address Amtrak's problems in the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, where I am the Vice Chairman.

We will also do preliminary work on the next Surface Transportation Bill in the Highways and Transit Subcommittee, where I am the Chairman. This bill, sometimes referred to as the "Highway Bill," is catch-all legislation which readjusts ground transportation policy approximately every six years, distributing many billions of dollars for road, transit, safety and related projects nationwide.

Campaign Finance Reform: The Congress is likely to revisit campaign finance reform in the months ahead. The Senate has already approved a plan, while its supporters in the House are very close to achieving a majority. I have long supported campaign finance reform and have introduced my own bills, but have some concerns about the Senate's proposal.

Education: In the Committee on Education and the Workforce, where I am Vice Chairman, the main priority over the coming months will be reform of federal special education programs.

Three issues will receive substantial attention: getting the federal government to pay more of the cost of providing education to disabled students, how to discipline disabled students (who currently enjoy special protections which exempt them from sanctions used to discipline other students), and figuring out how to avoid "overidentifying" students as disabled, placing them in special education classes when they don't really belong there.

New Life for the Fox Locks

On November 12, the President signed into law the Energy and Water Appropriations Act for the 2002 budget year. This law includes a provision dedicating \$5 million to the transfer of the Fox River Locks system from the Army Corps of Engineers to the state of Wisconsin.

Under an agreement between the state government and the Army, an additional \$5 million will be needed to bring about the final transfer. Budget negotiators for the House and the Senate asked the Army Corps of Engineers to find the money in its budget so the transfer can be completed in 2002. Failing that, the negotiators stated their intent that Congress will provide the money in 2003.

Wisconsin's goal is to return the locks to working order. If the Army followed through on its alternative plans to permanently close the locks, this, too, would cost millions of dollars to complete. Accordingly, the state government and local residents have been working to spend the money to restore the locks rather than close them.

As a key part of the first great interstate system in America, the locks have true historical importance. They are also an important potential tourist attraction, and a part of Wisconsin's high quality of life.



As Chairman of the Highways and Transit Subcommittee, Rep. Petri participated in an October 10 press conference held to highlight "Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day." Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death in the U.S. for people ages six through 33. Each year more than 40,000 people are killed and more than 5 million are injured on U.S. highways. Supporters of Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day plan to use annual events to remind drivers that driving after drinking, driving while drowsy, driving without seatbelts, at excessive speeds, or while distracted can be fatal – not only to the driver, but to all who share the road. One of the key tasks of the Highways and Transit Subcommittee is to find ways to improve highway safety while also helping people get where they need to go.

“Next window please.” Those words are seen and heard much too often, and the government gets the lion’s share of the blame when it comes to giving people the run-around.

It’s not our federal employees’ fault — the vast majority are hard-working people who are trying to do their best under difficult circumstances. The problem lies with the enormous size of the federal bureaucracy and the huge quantity of paperwork which must be processed.

One of my jobs as a representative in Congress is to help 6th District residents in their dealings with the federal government. Many people call, write, or visit because they are having trouble with Social Security, Medicare or veterans benefits. I have also helped constituents obtain passports on short notice and assisted service members with family emergencies. And local businesses frequently need help with applications for federal contracts.

No representative can order agency officials around, but with the help of my staff it’s often possible to get answers where previously there was only silence or confusion. Here are some examples of recent casework successes:

LET ME HELP

Problem: An elderly Waupaca County woman received several notices from the Social Security Administration (SSA) claiming she had been overpaid without providing an explanation. Her future benefits were being drastically reduced to recover this supposed overpayment. She had called and visited the local SSA office to no avail.

Solution: My staff contacted the SSA requesting an explanation for the overpayment and the withholding of her monthly checks. SSA officials called back stating they had made an error and would return all the money that was withheld and increased her monthly payments to their previous level.

Problem: A Kiel resident broke his arm while visiting his brother in the Air Force. He was seen briefly at the base hospital before being referred to a civilian hospital for treatment. However, he was billed \$247 by the Air Force for checking his vital signs and determining he could not be treated. The civilian hospital charged less than \$200 for his entire treatment including x-rays!

Solution: I sent a letter to the Air Force to complain about the excessive bill for no treatment. The Air Force responded by eliminating his hospital charges.

Problem: A Juneau County veteran was unable to obtain health benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) because a computer glitch rendered his file useless. He needed to open a new claim but all of the records proving his military service were stolen from his house during a burglary. Needing medicine, he didn’t have time to wait several months to obtain copies of his records and so he contacted me.

Solution: I wrote the records center asking that his records request be expedited for medical reasons. He received the verification of his service shortly after I sent my inquiry.

Consumer Protections When Changing Homes

People are vulnerable when they take everything that they own and put it in the back of a stranger’s truck to be moved to a new neighborhood, a distant city, or a different state. That little voice between your ears can get quite persistent: “Will our stuff get there safely? Will we get it back? Will the bill be the same as the estimate?”

And with good reason.

In 1998 the transportation subcommittee which I chair held a hearing to learn about problems in the household moving industry. Some consumers told us that their belongings had been held hostage by movers who low-balled estimates and then forced them to pay additional thousands of dollars in cash in order to get their property back. Others said their carriers damaged or lost their property but refused to agree to a settlement.

Certainly, the vast majority of movers are honest. But there are 1.4 million household moves across state lines each year, and the Better Business Bureau says it received over 5,000 complaints on interstate and in-state moves in 1999. That figure was up 72% over three years before.

We all know there’s a problem out there. It’s hard for consumers to figure out who to call when they get cheated, so there are probably far more problems than the ones the Better Business Bureau and the government hear about. We all know from relatives and friends, and in my case from constituents, employees and others, that more effective consumer protection is needed.

In 1998 I asked the Transportation Department to pay more attention to this issue. Then, this past July, I chaired an additional hearing to find out why things seem to be getting worse, and to hear from state attorneys

general, regulators, people in the moving industry and others to see if we could come up with some ideas about how to move forward in a constructive way.

Trusting your property to strangers is often unavoidable during a move — and there’s nothing the government can do about that. But a second vulnerability arises from different jurisdictions within and between states, and between states and the federal government.

If something goes wrong, where do you go? To the police in your old home town, or in your new home town? Or to the Attorney General in either your old or new state? To the Better

Business Bureau or a consumer affairs office if one is operated by your state or county? And, once you find the appropriate place to lodge your complaint, will there be a clear path leading to a proper resolution?

In response, my subcommittee is trying to develop a federal-state partnership to clarify the laws and areas of jurisdiction governing the interstate movement of household goods, and to come up with a program to help coordinate the efforts of all those who are supposed to help people who find themselves victimized by fraudulent or incompetent movers.

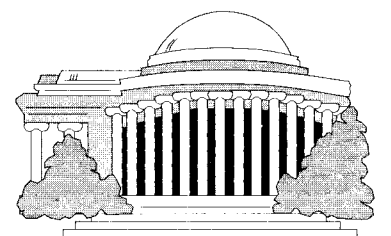
Visiting Washington?

If you and your family are planning a trip to Washington, DC in the next few months, please be advised that some places of interest are closed for security reasons. Unfortunately, all congressional tours of the White House, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Capitol building have been suspended until further notice.

Although a Washington, DC visit may not seem the same without touring these places, keep in mind that many of the other wonderful places to see are open to the public. Among these are the Smithsonian Institution, including the Air and Space Museum, the Natural History Museum, the American History Museum, and numerous art museums. The National Zoo is open, as well as the Library of Congress and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The Lincoln, Jefferson and Roosevelt memorials are all open, and everyone is welcome at the Vietnam and Korean war memorials. Ground has been broken for the World War II Memorial, but it will not be ready for visitors for some time. The Washington Monument is closed for long-planned renovations.

If you are planning a Washington, DC vacation, please feel free to call one of my offices for information about the metropolitan area and possible tickets for attractions.



Internships for College Students

Would you like to learn more about our federal government—especially how Congress really works? If so, you might consider an internship in my Washington office. Interns in my office are unpaid, but I cooperate with schools that are willing to offer credit for the experience. The work required is not complicated, but it is important and provides a chance to get a first hand look at Congress and government service.

For further information, check my web site at

www.house.gov/petri/intern.htm

Keeping in Touch

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call or write. In addition to the usual “old fashioned” addresses and numbers on page 1, you can contact me by e-mail. Due to the high volume of messages coming to my old e-mail address from all over the country, I am now asking everybody from the 6th District to use the form linked to the front page of my web site found at

www.house.gov/petri/

This form filters out “spam” e-mail, which can number in the hundreds or thousands on any given day. When writing by e-mail, please include your name and postal address to guarantee a response.

Also, for those who would like to hear from me more frequently, I put out an occasional e-mail newsletter discussing issues currently receiving attention in Congress. If you would like to be added to my e-mail distribution list, drop me a note via my web site as explained above.

High School Students: Service Academies Want You!

It's not too early for high school juniors to start thinking about seeking appointment to the U.S. service academies – the Military Academy at West Point, NY; the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md.; the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colo.; and the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, NY.

Nominations are based solely on the recommendations of an independent, bipartisan selection committee comprised of 6th District citizens. Those seeking nomination for the 2003-2004 school year should contact one of my offices listed in this newsletter. Also, information and computer links to the academies' web sites can be found in the Students' Page section of my web site located at:

www.house.gov/petri/kids.htm

Representative Tom Petri's January, 2002 CITIZENS HOURS SCHEDULED

Citizens Hours Scheduled

During the 106th Congress I spent 234 days working in Wisconsin, held 56 citizen hours in 26 cities, hosted 42 town meetings in 18 locations, and made 574 stops in 87 cities and towns.

In town meetings I meet with constituents to discuss national issues in a group setting. Citizen hours, on the other hand, provide an opportunity to meet one-on-one with individuals who need help with Social Security or veterans benefits, who want to ask for help getting into the U.S. Military Academies, who want privately to discuss problems with farm programs, with the Internal Revenue Service and the like, or who simply want to express opinions about issues of national concern.

My latest round of citizen hours will take place from January 7 through January 10 at 14 locations throughout central Wisconsin. Please come and express your opinions

Monday, January 7th

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.—**DARBOY**
Buchanan Town Hall,
N178 County Road N

1:30 - 2:45 p.m.—**NEENAH**
City Hall, 211 Walnut Street
City Council Chambers

3:30 - 4:45 p.m.—**OSHKOSH**
City Hall, 215 Church Avenue
Room 406

Tuesday, January 8th

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.—**WAUPACA**
Waupaca County Courthouse
811 Harding Street, County Board Room

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 Noon—**WAUTOMA**
Waushara County Job Center
205 East Main Street
Conference Room

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.—**GREEN LAKE**
Caestecker Public Library
518 Hill Street, Conference Room

3:30 - 4:45 p.m.—**FOND DU LAC**
City-County Government Center
160 South Macy Street
Meeting Rooms D & E

Wednesday, January 9th

10:30 - 11:30 a.m.—**PLYMOUTH**
City Hall, 128 Smith Street
City Council Chambers

2:00 - 3:00 p.m.—**CHILTON**
City Hall, 42 School Street
City Council Chambers

4:00 - 5:15 p.m.—**TWO RIVERS**
City Hall, 1717 East Park Street
City Council Chambers

Thursday, January 10th

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.—**MAUSTON**
Hatch Public Library
111 West State Street
Community Room

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 Noon—**TOMAH**
City Hall, 819 Superior Avenue
City Council Chambers

2:00 - 3:00 p.m.—**ADAMS**
Adams County Library
101 South Main Street
Meeting Room

4:00 - 5:00 p.m.—**MONTELO**
Marquette County Courthouse
77 West Park Street, County Board Room